

Breaking the Silence on Instagram: Cyberphenomenology and Survivor Narratives on Instagram

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Abstract

This study tackles an important gap in research regarding the digital empowerment of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) survivors, specifically examining how they use social media, particularly Instagram, to voice their experiences and break the silence surrounding their trauma. Utilizing a cyberphenomenological approach, the research delves into how survivors portray themselves through digital avatars and investigates the motivations behind their public disclosures. Key questions addressed include the methods of disclosure, the reasons behind them, and the impact of the "Break the Silence" movement on the recovery journeys of survivors. The findings indicate that survivors' motivations for sharing their stories align with three main objectives: pursuing legal action, achieving self-acceptance, and seeking community support. The "motives for" disclosure encompass the desire for justice, offering support, and raising public awareness, while the "motives due to" disclosure are linked to the presence of perpetrators, insufficient support, and societal stigma. Through social media, survivors navigate intricate digital environments that act as a "second life," allowing them to engage continuously in self-healing and advocacy roles, including being content creators and supporters for others affected. The study underscores the transformative potential of social media for both personal and communal recovery, suggesting that digital platforms provide a unique and empowering space for survivors. These findings enhance our understanding of survivor agency and may inform future social and psychological support frameworks, promoting a culture that recognizes survivors as empowered individuals, especially within the changing societal landscape of Indonesia.

Keywords: cyberphenomenology, CSA, Instagram, survivor of CSA, meaning, motive

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The lasting effect of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) on survivors profoundly influences their lives, pushing them to the margins of emotional, psychological, and even social well-being. For a young life disrupted by such a traumatic event, the ripples of effect are felt well into adulthood. What public attention CSA has been able to garner has largely been thanks to the brave few who have come forward to tell their stories. These not only describe the heinous act of abuse itself but bear witness to the long-term wayward course many survivors seem condemned to follow post-abuse. Survivors have in no small part been responsible for pushing the CSA narrative forward and amassing support for increased funding, attention, and resources to help stop the abuse and aid the abused.

The recent societal push toward being vulnerable and authentic has opened up another avenue for normalizing conversations around trauma. It has potentially aided in the public acceptance of discussing the impact of childhood sexual abuse. When well-known public figures discuss their abuse in a way that is relatable and authentic, it makes it more acceptable for "ordinary" people to do the same. Still, many survivors are not doing this, and why is that? Stigma and lack of resources are two big reasons, and we need to focus on those two problems to get at the sad and unfortunate lack of safe, accessible, validating environments where CSA survivors can do this thing called "healing" in "public." (Mason, 2020; Smith, 2021).

Initially, the #MeToo movement brought attention to the abuse cases that exist in many well-known sectors of society.

The movement took these cases and used them to reveal the power abuses that happen between powerful figures and vulnerable individuals of all ages. The movement gave new life to many individuals' stories and, in turn, provided society with real-life examples of what it is when someone is taken advantage of and how the digital spaces of today's society are being used as a means of reclamation. Survivors now can take what was done to them and make a public statement about it in a world that is constantly watching through the guise of social media.

While the #MeToo movement resonated in Indonesia, it evolved differently due to increasing internet use, an expanding media environment, and a growing awareness regarding sexual violence (Elindawati, 2021). However, an organized movement against CSA is virtually nonexistent, and the cultural standards for society are still to turn a blind eye and assuage that such conversations do not happen. Although many Indonesian survivors experienced an abusive childhood and their family create a constraint for them to talk about it or they are expected to be silent due to the stigma in society (Ahrens et al., 2010). Such culturally particular obstacles highlight an important need for alternative venues where survivors freely share their trauma with no fear of being censured.

Social media platforms have increasingly been recognized as a new space where survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) can disclose and connect with others having similar experiences in the past few years (Gundersen & Zaleski, 2021). Writing, especially informal sharing through social platforms like Instagram, presents a less formalistic and intimidating space for survivors to share their stories that can be beneficial for those who may feel invisible or unheard in more traditional scenarios. Survivors can create digital avatars that represent themselves and their survival in this virtual space, adding digitally to cybercommunities that support repairing, growing (Winters et al., 2020) and rebuilds systems of resilience (Lusky-Weisrose et al., 2021). These platforms being interactive strongly promote not only sharing of our narratives by survivors but also foster collective solidarity, that might enhance the therapeutic effects of disclosure (Gueta et al., 2020; Naresh et al., 2021). Moving disclosure online makes your form of knowledge important: you have to know what these environments do to survivors and our ability to sense this kind of violence.

This suggest that online platforms could provide an alternate space for disclosure, especially within geographical locations where cultural and institutional barriers may exist around CSA discussions (Lusky-Weisrose et al., 2021; Hart-Owens, 2022). Social media has been recognised as an important enabler for overcoming these barriers, allowing survivors to tell their story in what may not be a receptive context (for example ultraorthodox communities), where social norms limit the discussion of such kinds of experience (Lusky-Weisrose et al., 2021). In addition, since online platforms provide anonymity and distance between the user and others nearby, this might reduce fears of negative repercussions after disclosure since risk is low (Bogen et al., 2019; Hall, 2021).

Potentially even more important is the context of social reactions after online disclosures, which can directly affect survivors' mental health impacts. Social reactions, such as validation and support have been associated with healthy psychological well-being while negative reactions can feed into a cycle of shame and self-blame leading to increased post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Bhuptani et al. 2023; Kazlauskas et al. 2017; Wamuyu et al. 2021). Several movements, like #MeToo, have shown how social media can amplify voices and build a community of survivors who encourage others to come forward by sharing their experiences or by getting support (Schneider & Carpenter 2019; Bogen et al. 2019). The projected risk of adverse online experiences demands additional investigation into the principles underlying social testimonials and their impact on resilience (Hart-Owens, 2022; Bhuptani et al., 2023).

Approaching CSA disclosure on Instagram in Indonesia as a form of communication, this study utilizes the concept of "cyberphenomenology" to explore how digital avatars are employed by survivors to express and gratify their CSA experiences. While international research on CSA disclosure in online settings does exist, what is less known is how survivors from Indonesia use social media as a platform to "break the silence," which this study seeks to address. It examines the reasons for their sharing, barriers that they encounter and the perceived role of such a process in their recovery experiences.

This study thus also informs survivor empowerment and digital identity formation using a phenomenological approach. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study examines survivors meaning-making around their online survival pronoun usage and the tenuous balance between agency and cyberspace. Focusing on the Indonesian cybercommunity and survivor avatars provides important insights about using technology to aid CSA disclosure delivery, connecting psychological recovery with socio-cultural acceptance.

1.2 Existing Research on CSA Survivor Healing and Digital Disclosure

Prior research that has explored the healing process for CSA survivors, emphasizes not only how survivors disclose abuse experiences, but also finding strength and agency in being able to speak about their trauma (Gordon et al., 2020; Lannin & McLay, 2019). Examining different survivor definitions of healing, Jeong and Cha (2019) conducted a foundational study in their qualitative meta-synthesis titled *Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Meta-Synthesis of*

Qualitative Studies. Outlining a systematic healing process, they suggested moving away from trauma memories, generating comfort zones, starting recovery by revealing one self and the experience of trauma (disclosure), formulating identity through reflection, finding relief in shared histories and merging CSA into the person's narrative. While these results offer a unique perspective of the post-attack recovery process, this study also investigates how survivors utilize Instagram as a means of processing their individual experiences and connecting with one another to form uniquely digital spaces of self-expression.

In like manner, "I Never Told Anyone Until the #MeToo Movement: What Can We Learn from Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault Disclosures through Social Media" Alaggia & Wang (2020) highlight the corrective function of social media platforms, allowing survivors to share their wounds publicly when traditional systems break down. They claim that online platforms can offer survivors validation and community, particularly in situations where they believe family or institutions are not coming to their aid. This research takes some of the points introduced from this literature, investigating the opportunity of social media empowering Indonesian survivors and that there will be a possibility for them to speak or even publish their CSA experience on this media.

In another significant work (Gundersen & Zaleski, 2021), "Posting the Story of Your Sexual Assault Online: A Phenomenological Study of Aftermath," the authors found that most participants expressed positive responses from disclosing their stories publicly, but two reported negative outcomes. This study reflects on the complex character of insurance that appears essential for healing, suggesting that revealing painful recent experience may bolster or impede recovery as a private event or social phenomenon. We build upon the findings of Gundersen and Zaleski through contextualizing the experience of disclosure in Indonesia, showing both benefits but also potential harm to survivors on Instagram.

These studies provide a rich underlying basis for developing an understanding of CSA survivors healing and their disclosure processes. This brief discussion of social media as an ingredient in this conversation illuminates the increasingly dynamic nature of survivor expression, and serves to emphasize the need for sensitive macro approaches that recognize both sides of identity affirmation and associated distress (Hailes et al., 2019; Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Maier, 2022).

1.3 Cultural and Social Challenges in CSA Disclosure in Indonesia

The context in Indonesia presents distinct cultural and social dynamics that make it challenging for survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) to disclose their experiences. Research by Sarimin and Maharesti (2020) and Hidayati et al. (2022) shows that survivors in Indonesia encounter significant social stigma, heavily influenced by cultural norms that discourage open conversations about sexual abuse. Sarimin and Maharesti highlight how the Javanese emphasis on modesty and self-restraint creates anxiety among survivors, who worry about potential negative social consequences. This is consistent with findings from Solehati et al. (2021), which indicate that CSA is often under-reported due to societal misconceptions and the stigma surrounding victims, leading to feelings of guilt and shame. Hidayati et al. further characterize CSA as an "unseen epidemic" in Indonesia, pointing out that actual cases may be significantly underreported because of taboos and the absence of reliable protections for survivors after they disclose their experiences. The interaction between modesty culture and rape culture, as discussed by Susanti (2023), worsens this problem by normalizing and trivializing sexual violence, creating an environment where survivors are less inclined to come forward.

For many survivors, deciding whether to disclose their experiences or stay silent presents its own set of challenges, as each choice comes with intricate emotional and social consequences. Research by Mooney (2021) highlights that the dynamics surrounding disclosure can sometimes lead to re-traumatization, especially when survivors face negative reactions from their communities. This sentiment is supported by Katz et al. (2020), who stress the need for culturally sensitive approaches to disclosure, pointing out that cultural adaptations are essential to effectively tackle the unique challenges survivors encounter in various contexts. Additionally, findings from Lusky-Weisrose et al. (2020) indicate that ethno-cultural factors often complicate the disclosure process, which can hinder or delay survivors from seeking help. This complexity is further exemplified by the experiences of survivors in different cultural environments, as explored in the literature on CSA disclosure across diverse communities.

These studies reveal a significant gap in our understanding of how Indonesian survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) navigate the process of disclosure in the changing landscape of digital spaces. There is a lack of research on how these survivors utilize social media to overcome cultural obstacles and reclaim their stories. This study aims to address that gap by focusing on Instagram, investigating how survivors create and use digital avatars and identities to process and articulate their trauma within Indonesian online communities. The originality of this research lies in its application of cyberphenomenology to the experience of CSA disclosure on Instagram, a platform that is increasingly being used by survivors to speak out. By exploring the cultural aspects of digital disclosure, this research offers fresh insights into the

complex ways survivors engage with their trauma online, indicating that digital platforms can empower survivors in ways that are sensitive to cultural contexts, encourage open discussions about CSA, and foster societal changes in how trauma and recovery are perceived. Ultimately, this study enhances our understanding of digital spaces as transformative resources for survivors, especially in socio-culturally conservative environments like Indonesia.

2. Method

This study employs a cyberphenomenological research design using a qualitative approach and the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. Cyberphenomenology is grounded in the concept of consciousness as experienced within digitally mediated environments, where intersubjective meaning-making occurs through media technologies. It examines how digital communication technologies shape perception, awareness, and embodiment, and how individuals navigate social realities reconstructed through digital devices, networks, and virtual environments (Bungin, 2023).

In this study, cyberphenomenology is used to explore how survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) disclose and construct meaning about their experiences through Instagram. The digital space is treated not merely as a communication channel but as a lived experiential field in which survivors negotiate identity, trauma narratives, and social recognition.

Table 1. Research Subjects

No	Instagram Account	Name	Account Status	Region
1	iamperrypower	Perry Power	Verified	United Kingdom
2	theedgeofthebed	Ryan Gadsby	Unverified	United Kingdom
3	couch.bonnie	Bonnie Couch	Unverified	United States
4	just_jamie_and_3	Jamie	Unverified	-
5	deborahshanley	Debra Shanley	Unverified	Texas
6	priskaprilly	Priska	Unverified	Indonesia
7	ummu_saidah	Saidah	Unverified	Indonesia
8	rhesyainlisbon	Rhesya Agustine	Unverified	Indonesia
9	Michelle4sh	Michelle Ashley Rezya	Unverified	Indonesia

Source: Research Results, 2024

Case Selection and Research Subjects

Research subjects consist of publicly accessible Instagram accounts representing CSA survivors' avatars within a digital community (cybercommunity). The selection of cases followed a purposive sampling strategy, consistent with IPA's idiographic orientation, which prioritizes depth of meaning over representativeness.

The case selection process followed Bungin's (2023) five-step social media data collection procedure:

(1) Simplify, (2) Search, (3) Trace, (4) Select, and (5) Save.

Accounts were identified through systematic keyword searches ("sexual abuse survivor," "child sexual abuse," "childhood sexual abuse," and "sexual violence"). The inclusion criteria were:

1. The account publicly shares personal experiences related to CSA.
2. The content includes narrative disclosures (captions, videos, reels, or threads) that reflect lived experience rather than general advocacy only.
3. The account demonstrates active engagement in 2024 (e.g., recent posts, comments, or interactions).
4. The account has a minimum level of audience engagement (at least several hundred followers or interactions with verified accounts), ensuring social interaction within the digital community.
5. The account is publicly accessible for ethical observation and analysis.

Nine accounts meeting these criteria were selected (see Table 1). The relatively small number of cases aligns with IPA methodology, which emphasizes detailed, case-by-case examination before cross-case comparison.

Data Collection

Data were collected using digital data mining techniques focusing on Instagram content. The unit of analysis included posts, captions, visual narratives, comment interactions, and sequential storytelling patterns. Rather than relying on automated scraping alone, the researcher conducted systematic manual tracing to preserve contextual meaning and narrative flow. The approach involved identifying narrative sequences over time to capture patterns of disclosure, emotional framing, interactional responses, and meaning construction within digital interactions.

Analytical Procedure (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)

1. Reading and Re-reading

Each account's narrative content was examined repeatedly to achieve immersion in the data and to understand the survivor's experiential world within the digital context.

2. Initial Noting

Exploratory comments were generated, focusing on descriptive (content), linguistic (language use, metaphors, tone), and conceptual (interpretative meaning) elements.

3. Development of Emergent Themes

The initial notes were transformed into emergent themes that captured essential aspects of the survivor's lived experience in the digital space.

4. Searching for Connections Across Themes

Themes within each case were clustered into superordinate categories through abstraction and conceptual mapping.

5. Cross-Case Analysis

After completing idiographic analysis for each account, patterns across cases were identified while preserving each case's uniqueness.

The analytical framework is informed by Alfred Schutz's phenomenology, particularly the distinction between goal-oriented motives (in-order-to motives) and because motives, which helped interpret survivors' intentions for disclosure and the background experiences shaping their narratives (Schutz in Wirman & Sari, 2019).

Data Saturation

Data saturation was reached when no new thematic insights emerged from additional posts or narrative sequences within and across accounts. After iterative analysis of the ninth account, thematic repetition became evident, particularly regarding motives for disclosure, identity reconstruction, and digital solidarity. This indicated sufficient depth and redundancy for phenomenological interpretation.

Researcher Reflexivity

Given the interpretative nature of IPA and cyberphenomenology, researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the study. The researcher engaged in reflexive journaling to document personal assumptions, emotional responses to trauma narratives, and potential biases related to digital activism and gender-based violence discourse. Bracketing strategies were applied to distinguish participants' meaning-making from the researcher's preconceptions. Additionally, analytic decisions were documented in an audit trail to enhance transparency and credibility.

3. Results

This section offers a detailed examination of Instagram avatars representing childhood sexual abuse (CSA) survivors, focusing on their methods of disclosure, motivations, and the impact of sharing on their feelings of empowerment. The accompanying tables shed light on the strategies, objectives, and effects of these avatars, enhancing our understanding of how digital platforms can aid in the trauma disclosure process within Indonesian contexts.

3.1 Overview of Survivor Avatars

Table 1 presents the Instagram accounts examined in this study, outlining their verification status, location, and engagement levels. The majority of these accounts are unverified and represent survivors from various regions, including Indonesia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This varied digital representation emphasizes the global aspect of CSA discussions on social media, showcasing how the platform connects survivors from different backgrounds. The accounts provide distinct viewpoints shaped by their geographical and cultural settings, enhancing the study's investigation into disclosure dynamics. Verified accounts, like Perry Power, demonstrate higher engagement levels, while unverified accounts offer grassroots narratives. This variety indicates Instagram's broad appeal in CSA discussions, enabling survivors from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their experiences and forge global connections through hashtags such as #CSAsurvivor, #BreakTheSilence, and #EndCSA.

The diversity of regions represented by these avatars underscores the global and culturally rich character of CSA disclosure on Instagram. Survivors from the United Kingdom, United States, and Indonesia illustrate how geographic and socio-cultural contexts shape their disclosure strategies: Western accounts tend to be more direct and advocacy driven, often connected to campaigns and public awareness movements, whereas Indonesian narratives are commonly framed through personal reflection, faith-based resilience, and community-oriented values influenced by norms of shame, honor, and family reputation. Moreover, verification status differentiates visibility and authority: verified accounts such as Perry Power attract broader engagement and function as opinion leaders or movement catalysts, while unverified accounts

emphasize intimate storytelling that fosters peer support and emotional solidarity. Together, these variations position Instagram as a transnational digital sphere where survivors negotiate stigma, reclaim agency, and build supportive communities, transforming silence and isolation into connection and empowerment within a global online network.

3.2 Trauma Response Strategies and Goals

In Table 2, avatars are grouped based on their trauma response strategies: approach or avoidance. The approach strategy, evident in avatars like Perry Power, showcases traits of openness and resilience. In contrast, avoidance strategies, as seen in Priska and Saidah, often mirror societal or cultural pressures that lead to indirect trauma engagement. This classification highlights how Instagram serves as both a therapeutic environment and a platform for justice, with #JusticeforSurvivors acting as a rallying cry for legal action. These responses add depth, with approach strategies typically encouraging community involvement, while avoidance strategies establish boundaries for self-protection.

Table 2. Disclosure Strategies and Goals

No	Instagram Account	Trauma Response Strategy	Goal
1	iamperrypower	Approach	Embrace
2	theedgeofthebed	Approach	Embrace
3	couch.bonnie	Approach	Self-acceptance
4	just_jamie_and_3	Approach	Self-acceptance
5	deborahshanley	Approach	Self-acceptance
6	priskaprilly	Avoidance	Legal Action
7	ummu_saidah	Avoidance	Legal Action
8	rhesyainlisbon	Approach-Avoidance	Self-acceptance
9	Michelle4sh	Avoidance	Self-acceptance

The distinction between approach and avoidance strategies in responding to childhood sexual abuse (CSA) reveals diverse and culturally situated pathways of trauma processing on Instagram. Survivors adopting an approach strategy use the platform as a dialogical and restorative space, sharing explicit, reflective, and future-oriented narratives that integrate trauma into a coherent life story, foster self-acceptance, and build relational solidarity through collective engagement. In contrast, avoidance-oriented strategies reflect more guarded communication, emphasizing justice, advocacy, and institutional accountability rather than detailed emotional disclosure particularly in contexts like Indonesia, where stigma, family honor, and communal reputation shape public expression. Here, avoidance represents boundary-setting and culturally adaptive coping rather than denial, often channeling personal trauma into legal awareness or systemic reform efforts. The presence of hybrid “approach–avoidance” patterns further demonstrates that trauma responses are dynamic and fluid, shaped by psychological readiness, audience interaction, and socio-cultural context. Overall, Instagram functions as a multifaceted digital sphere that accommodates personal storytelling, collective healing, advocacy mobilization, and protective silence, enabling survivors to negotiate agency, reconstruct identity, and align disclosure strategies with their psychological needs and cultural environments.

3.3 Motivations for Disclosure

Table 3 explores the motivations behind digital disclosure among survivors, highlighting the distinction between “in-order-to” (future-oriented) and “because-of” (past-oriented) motivations. Future-oriented motivations, illustrated by Perry Power’s experience, focus on community support and educational outreach, often using hashtags like #SupportSurvivors and #HealingJourney. In contrast, past-oriented motivations, as demonstrated in Priska’s situation, emphasize a causality-driven approach aimed at confronting the perpetrator and challenging societal stigma. This duality illustrates how survivors can turn their traumatic experiences into advocacy, addressing unresolved issues while navigating the balance between healing narratives and the pursuit of justice.

Table 3. Disclosure Motivations

No	Instagram Account	“In-order-to” Motives	“Because-of” Motives
1	iamperrypower	Support, Educate	Perpetrator presence, Lack of support, Stigma
3	couch.bonnie	Support	Lack of support
6	priskaprilly	Punish Perpetrator	Perpetrator presence

The motivations for disclosure in Table 3 demonstrate that digital storytelling is a socially and psychologically situated decision shaped by both forward-looking aspirations (“in order to”) and backward-looking triggers (“because of”). Goal-oriented motives frame disclosure as transformative action, as survivors such as Perry Power and Couch Bonnie reposition personal trauma into missions of support, education, and awareness, turning lived experience into collective empowerment. Conversely, causality-driven motives highlight structural injustice, stigma, and the continued presence of perpetrators as catalysts that break silence, positioning disclosure as resistance, testimony, and a demand for accountability. The coexistence of these motives reveals that healing and advocacy are intertwined rather than separate processes: survivors

may speak out in response to unresolved harm while gradually evolving toward educational and supportive goals. In this way, Instagram functions as a mediating arena where private suffering intersects with public discourse, enabling survivors to transform trauma into emotional solidarity, legal mobilization, and socially meaningful empowerment.

3.4 Impact of Disclosure and Classification of Survivor Avatars

The impact of disclosure on empowerment is examined by categorizing avatars into bloggers, content creators, influencers, consultants, and mentors. Each category showcases a unique style of engagement on Instagram, where survivors adopt different approaches to aid their own and others' recovery journeys. These roles illustrate various engagement styles that promote both personal healing and community support. Consultants like Perry Power offer mentorship and resilience-focused content, frequently using hashtags such as #HealingTogether and #CSAAadvocacy to foster community. Bloggers and content creators, including Deborah Shanley and Michelle Ashley, share more relatable, personal stories, creating connections and providing followers with a comforting space to reflect on their own experiences.

Table 4. Avatar Classification

No	Instagram Account	Avatar Classification
1	iamperrypower	Consultant
2	theedgeofthebed	Consultant
3	couch.bonnie	Blogger
4	just_jamie_and_3	Blogger
5	deborahshanley	Content Creator
6	priskaprilly	Blogger
7	ummu_saidah	Blogger
8	rhesyainlisbon	Content Creator
9	Michelle4sh	Blogger

The classification of survivor avatars demonstrates that empowerment on Instagram unfolds in layered and evolving forms. Consultants and mentors such as Perry Power and Ryan Gadsby embody symbolic authority by transforming lived experience into structured guidance, resilience frameworks, and movement-oriented advocacy reinforced through collective hashtags, thereby externalizing healing into leadership. In contrast, bloggers and content creators like Deborah Shanley and Michelle Ashley emphasize intimacy, emotional fluctuation, and everyday reflection, fostering horizontal solidarity where empowerment emerges dialogically through mutual recognition between storyteller and audience. These roles illustrate Instagram's structural flexibility in accommodating professional advocacy, creative storytelling, and peer-based exchange, while remaining fluid identity positions that survivors may shift between as their confidence and goals develop. Overall, the platform functions as a digital arena of identity reconstruction in which survivors move from silence to agency, reshaping themselves as educators, advocates, and community builders; empowerment thus operates both individually through narrative control and collectively through transnational solidarity that challenges stigma and sustains social change.

4. Discussion

This study examines how survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) in Indonesia utilize Instagram to share their stories and create supportive communities within a culturally conservative context. By employing cyberphenomenology, the research uncovers how these survivors turn Instagram into a platform for resilience, advocacy, and the reconstruction of their identities. Social media, particularly Instagram, provides them with a safer and less confrontational way to disclose their experiences compared to face-to-face discussions, which can be difficult in stigmatizing environments (Attrash-Najjar et al., 2023).

Survivors often utilize hashtags such as #BreakTheSilence and #LetsTalkAbuse to engage in online conversations that confront the stigma surrounding child sexual abuse. These hashtags serve as both personal and collective instruments for advocacy and connection (Bogen et al., 2019). This online participation is vital in cultures where discussions about sexual abuse are often restricted, emphasizing the importance of social media as a safe environment for expression and validation (Kennedy & Prock, 2016). Research indicates that online communities provide crucial emotional support and help cultivate a sense of belonging, which is beneficial for the healing journey (Fawcett & Shrestha, 2016).

This study highlights significant academic implications and the strategies that survivors utilize online for healing and advocacy. It indicates that survivors frequently adopt coping mechanisms such as mindfulness and fostering a positive self-image, which are enhanced through supportive interactions online (Schomerus et al., 2021). Engaging with others who have similar experiences further strengthens resilience and mental health (Westhuizen et al., 2022). The research shows that CSA survivors turn to Instagram as a platform to openly discuss and process their trauma using various strategies, including both approach and avoidance methods. Survivors like Perry Power share direct, empowering stories, using hashtags like #BreakingTheSilence and expressing his journey with statements such as, "I want someone to see me and say, 'because of you, I didn't give up.'" Power's proactive stance, evident in his captioned posts, reflects a willingness to embrace his past and transform it into an inspiring narrative that encourages others to face similar challenges.

Conversely, survivors like Priska, who document legal actions against their abusers on Instagram, represent an avoidance strategy; her posts serve as a way to create distance from her trauma while advocating for justice on behalf of her child. Her heartfelt plea, “help us to get justice... I never knew he could do this on her birthday,” highlights the difficulties survivors encounter in pursuing accountability within a restrictive social context.

The data highlights two distinct types of motivations that drive each survivor's digital engagement: “in-order-to” (future-oriented) and “because-of” (causality-driven). These motivations influence how survivors engage and their intentions behind sharing their stories. For instance, Perry Power and Ryan Gadsby emphasize future-oriented motivations, seeking to support and educate their audience through hashtags like #LetsTalkAbuse and #SupportSurvivors. Their posts often feature calls to action, urging others to “speak up” and “find strength in vulnerability.” By presenting their trauma in an educational light, they transform personal suffering into a means of public service, effectively changing their narratives from victimhood to empowerment.

In contrast, Priska’s motivation, rooted in her experiences with past trauma, is evident in her words, such as, “This is a mother’s heartbreak... Sea cried because she was in pain.” Her posts are less about her own healing and more about seeking justice, highlighting the ongoing threat posed by the perpetrator in her child’s life. This focus on past harm aligns her Instagram presence with a mission for justice rather than a personal healing journey, distinguishing her from others who primarily use Instagram for self-acceptance.

Instagram’s digital platform offers a supportive environment for Indonesian survivors who encounter significant social stigma and cultural obstacles when sharing their experiences of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). The study emphasizes how these survivors create various digital identities through avatars, each representing a unique persona that embodies both personal trauma and collective advocacy. Survivors identified as content creators or influencers, like Debora Shanley, utilize hashtags such as #HealingJourney and #IamASurvivor to promote mental health awareness and recovery from trauma. Debora’s posts, including her narrative about overcoming self-hatred and embracing her scars after enduring years of abuse, resonate profoundly with her audience, fostering a culture of resilience and self-acceptance within the Instagram community. Her caption, “I am a survivor, I don’t just exist, I thrive,” captures the transformative potential of digital disclosure in redefining survivor identities.

The study also reveals that survivors who take on roles as consultants or mentors, like Perry Power and Ryan Gadsby, amplify their impact by offering practical advice to fellow survivors. For instance, Perry's statement, “I help survivors find healing by sharing their stories,” turns his Instagram page into a sort of support platform. His account provides an easy way for other survivors to seek guidance, encouraging them to view storytelling as a means of therapy. In this way, Instagram serves as a space where survivors can not only strengthen their own resilience but also act as advocates and mentors, promoting changes in societal attitudes toward CSA.

This research adds to the ongoing academic conversation about childhood sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure by highlighting the significance of culturally adaptive digital spaces for survivors. In Indonesia, where societal norms restrict open conversations about sexual abuse, Instagram serves as a culturally sensitive alternative. Digital platforms like Instagram allow survivors to navigate intricate cultural stigmas while engaging in self-expression that might not be possible in offline settings. This distinctive approach to disclosure underscores the necessity for digital platforms to foster culturally specific forms of engagement, accommodating various strategies that resonate with survivors’ cultural and social backgrounds. The emotional language present in trauma narratives, as noted by Wardecker et al., indicates that expressing emotions can greatly impact psychological adjustment among survivors, suggesting that platforms that enable such expressions are vital for healing (Wardecker et al., 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital spaces for survivors, especially as traditional support systems were disrupted. Emezue points out that emotional and material support for survivors is increasingly provided through digital and technology-based methods, which come with both benefits and challenges (Emezue, 2020). This change is particularly significant in situations where survivors experience coercive control and isolation. Alderson et al. stress the determination needed to navigate support systems when dealing with low self-confidence and self-esteem (Alderson et al., 2022). Being able to express oneself in a digital environment can help alleviate feelings of shame and isolation, which are often intensified by the societal stigma surrounding child sexual abuse (Ripoll-Núñez & Henao, 2022).

The research by Easton and Kong highlights the long-term mental health effects of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and emphasizes the need for supportive environments, both online and offline, where survivors can share their experiences without fear of being judged (Easton & Kong, 2017). The internet can be a safe space for survivors to connect with others who have gone through similar situations, helping to create a sense of community and belonging that they may not find in their immediate surroundings. This is especially important in cultures where talking about sexual abuse is considered taboo, as the anonymity and distance offered by online platforms can encourage survivors to open up about their experiences and seek assistance (McLean et al., 2018).

The use of hashtags in online conversations enhances personal stories and encourages a shared dialogue that addresses

societal taboos related to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Hashtags act as essential tools in digital spaces, enabling decentralized discussions that empower users to engage with and raise awareness about critical social issues, including CSA. This approach improves the spread of information and fosters community among users who have similar experiences or concerns (Thakur, 2023; Kreis, 2017). Additionally, hashtags inspire changes in behavior among users, motivating them to align their conversations with the meanings represented by these tags. This trend is particularly visible in movements like #MeToo, where the widespread use of hashtags has inspired individuals to share their experiences and advocate for change, effectively turning personal stories into a larger social narrative (Walker & Kaye, 2022). Engaging with specific hashtags reflects an individual's connection to a community and helps build a collective identity that challenges existing norms and taboos (McGlashan, 2019).

While the study highlights important contributions, it also points out gaps in our understanding of the full range of impacts related to digital disclosure. The avoidance strategies employed by avatars like Priska and Saidah, who focus on legal action and try to keep their distance from directly confronting their trauma, indicate that such avoidance might sometimes impede long-term psychological recovery. Furthermore, survivors like Rhesya Agustine, who weave their experiences of childhood sexual abuse into stand-up comedy, prompt us to consider the potential therapeutic or harmful effects of using humor in trauma disclosure. Her remark, "It empowers me when people laugh at my pedophile jokes because they're laughing at the abuser, not at me," showcases a distinctive coping mechanism that could benefit from further investigation to understand its effects on mental health and self-image.

Future research should investigate alternative methods of disclosure, such as humor and satire, as well as the effects of social media algorithms on disclosures related to child sexual abuse (CSA). The design of these platforms can greatly affect how survivors engage and how the public responds. This study takes a unique approach by applying a cyberphenomenological framework to the experiences of Indonesian survivors using Instagram for CSA disclosure. It reveals how digital avatars can assist in managing trauma and developing self-identity in environments with cultural constraints. Instagram serves as a powerful tool for survivors, allowing them to become storytellers and advocates, which indicates that social media could effectively raise awareness about CSA in conservative societies. By incorporating avatar-based disclosure into digital support systems, we could create culturally sensitive platforms that promote both personal and communal healing. Overall, this research emphasizes the transformative potential of Instagram in restrictive environments, enhancing our understanding of CSA recovery in digital contexts. Future studies should look into other cultural settings to see how digital platforms influence survivor narratives worldwide, highlighting the importance of culturally informed frameworks that encourage healing, advocacy, and social change.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights Instagram as a crucial platform for survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) to share their stories, find supportive communities, and promote healing. Using a cyberphenomenological approach, the research shows how survivors in Indonesia navigate cultural limitations, with digital avatars helping them balance advocacy and self-expression. A key finding is that survivors adopt different trauma response strategies, ranging from proactive to avoidance-based approaches, each influencing their recovery journey in distinct ways. The originality of this research lies in its use of cyberphenomenology to analyze CSA disclosures on Instagram within a culturally conservative context, shedding light on how survivors adapt their narratives and utilize hashtags to foster a communal and empowering environment. The study suggests that social media, as a culturally flexible digital space, can serve as both a sanctuary and a platform for marginalized voices, potentially reshaping societal views on CSA and trauma recovery.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relies exclusively on publicly accessible Instagram accounts, which represent curated digital self-presentations rather than comprehensive psychological realities. Survivors may selectively frame their narratives due to privacy concerns, audience expectations, or platform norms, limiting insight into their offline emotional processes. Second, the small, purposively selected sample aligns with the idiographic nature of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) but restricts generalizability beyond the specific cases examined. Third, the study does not incorporate direct psychological assessments or longitudinal data; therefore, claims regarding healing and empowerment are interpretative rather than clinically measured outcomes. Additionally, the research does not empirically analyze Instagram's algorithmic structures or moderation policies, which may significantly shape visibility, engagement, and the broader impact of digital disclosures.

Future research could investigate unconventional methods of disclosure, such as humor, incorporate longitudinal or mixed-method designs to assess long-term psychological outcomes, or examine how social media algorithms influence survivor engagement and public perception, given that platform design can greatly shape the dynamics of digital disclosure and digital empowerment.

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